

WHS UNIT

FIELDWORK GUIDELINES

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1 Introduction

Fieldwork involves tasks undertaken by University employees, students, collaborators and volunteers for research, teaching or instruction at locations which are not considered to be UOW workplaces, but where the University is responsible for the safety of its staff and students and those exposed to their activities.

The University conducts fieldwork which can be diverse in nature and may take place in unfamiliar surroundings. Tasks undertaken during fieldwork may involve a potentially high level of risk to the health and safety of the participants, and the fieldwork environment may be potentially hazardous. Furthermore, fieldwork is often undertaken at locations that isolate participants from ready access to emergency services.

The fieldwork location is recognised as a workplace under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)*. Accordingly, supervisors, staff and students are required to meet their legal obligations for work health and safety during fieldwork planning and participation.

It is the responsibility of all employees and students undertaking the fieldwork to adhere to the policies, codes and rules set out by the University. Employees or students found in breach of these requirements will be disciplined according to the appropriate UOW policy.

The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that when fieldwork is undertaken:

- potential and existing hazards are identified and reported; and
- identified risks are controlled, as far as is reasonably practicable.

2 Definitions

The following definitions apply to this document:

<i>Fieldwork</i>	Work undertaken involving research, teaching or instruction at a location off campus as part of the activities of a unit. Persons attending conferences, development and/or sabbatical leave are generally not considered to be undertaking fieldwork.
<i>Remote Fieldwork</i>	Fieldwork carried out by staff and students which is isolated due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Distance from major roads, towns or facilities;▪ Limited telephone or radio communications;▪ Limited number of persons on the fieldwork.
<i>Fieldwork Task</i>	The fieldwork can normally be broken down into a series of tasks. Examples include packing for fieldwork, travelling to and from fieldwork, food preparation and storage.
<i>Research Fieldwork</i>	Fieldwork normally carried out on a variable, short or long-term basis, e.g. Several field trips of 1 week duration, in remote locations. It is possible for the research fieldwork to have some periods of “non-remote” fieldwork interspersed with remote fieldwork.
<i>Undergraduate Fieldwork</i>	Fieldwork normally carried out on a short-term basis, e.g. a half or one day field trip, or longer as specified by course requirements, in locations generally not classified as remote. The fieldwork party may have access to a base camp from which daily trips are made. It is possible for undergraduate fieldwork to have some periods of “remote” fieldwork interspersed with other fieldwork.
<i>Fieldwork Party</i>	Comprises a party leader and UOW staff and students. A fieldwork party could also be academic and general staff only. Additional staff members or other approved persons may also participate in a fieldwork party.
<i>Hazard Identification</i>	The process of identifying identified hazards associated with the fieldwork. Potential hazards should be identified on the basis of previous experience or

from the anticipation of problems that can be reasonably associated with the activity.

Risk Control: The process of allocating physical, human and procedural resources to eliminate or to minimise, as far as is reasonably practicable, the risk to safety or health from the hazard.

3 Responsibilities

3.1 Head of Unit

- Ensure that adequate resources have been allocated for carrying out the fieldwork in accordance with the fieldwork risk assessment;
- Ensure that supervisors, staff and students are aware of their occupational health and safety responsibilities for the fieldwork;
- Ensure that appropriate records relating to fieldwork are kept according to legislative requirements. This includes completion and records management for the documents including fieldwork risk assessment, training qualifications etc.

3.2 Fieldwork Supervisor

- Provide appropriate supervision to ensure that all participants comply with the fieldwork risk assessment including staff, students, collaborators and volunteers;
- Appoint a second in charge for when the supervisor is unavailable;
- Supervise the development of, and approve, fieldwork risk assessments carried out by staff, students, collaborators and volunteers under their supervision;
- Distribute the completed risk assessment and other relevant documents, e.g. safe work procedures, to all participants. A copy of these documents must be filed in a central location within the unit as per the [WHS Records Handling Guidelines](#);
- Conduct a risk assessment on the fieldwork to be undertaken using the [fieldwork risk assessment form](#). Ensure that any actions required prior to commencement of the fieldwork has been completed;
- Ensure a [safe work procedure](#) is developed for any fieldwork task planned to be undertaken and where the absence of one would create an adverse risk to health and safety;
- Review the fieldwork risk assessment and ensure that updates are developed if the nature of the work changes and/or a plan proves inappropriate;
- Provide induction and training for fieldwork participants, if necessary;
- Complete the Fieldwork Participant List – Section 3 of the risk assessment form;
- Advise participants of their obligation to take appropriate medical advice and disclose any limitations imposed by their health, which may affect their ability to safely participate in the fieldwork;
- Ensure that appropriate safety and first aid equipment and personnel is available;
- Ensure the provision, maintenance and proper use of Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment (PPE) associated with the fieldwork;
- Ensure that corrective actions are implemented for all incidents involving fieldwork;
- Ensure visitors are made aware of, and abide by WHS requirements;
- Account for all fieldwork party members at every stage of the fieldwork;
- Ensure all members of the fieldwork adhere to local, state, federal and international laws at all times;
- Responsible for applying for permission to work in restricted areas which include national parks and catchment areas;
- Responsible for informing the public when fieldwork is likely to affect public areas.

3.3 Staff, Students, Collaborators and Volunteers

- Participate in the development of fieldwork risk assessment and obtain approval from the supervisor and Head of Unit prior to the commencement of fieldwork (e.g. the planning stage of a diving project);
- Participate in completing a risk assessment on hazards associated with the fieldwork using the [Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form](#);
- Participate in the use, development and review of safe work procedures for each fieldwork task as listed in the Fieldwork Risk Assessment;
- Follow the procedures set out in fieldwork risk assessment on a day-to-day basis;

- Limit fieldwork to activities specified in the approved fieldwork risk assessment;
- Participate in fieldwork induction and training programs as instructed by supervisors;
- Complete the [Fieldwork Participant Acknowledgement Form](#) and discuss medical conditions with the fieldwork supervisor;
- Comply with relevant UOW policy, procedures and guidelines including [WHS Risk Management Guidelines](#), [Working Alone and After Hours Work Guidelines](#);
- Report to the WHS Unit any accident, injury, illness or near miss event as soon as practicable as per [Incident Management and Reporting Guidelines](#) or call the WHS Unit on 4221 3931;
- Where possible report back to the University at regular intervals to update progress and status of the fieldwork party;
- Ensure that all local, state, federal and international laws are adhered to at all times.

4 Fieldwork Planning

The [Fieldwork Risk Assessment](#) is to be completed for all instances of fieldwork.

These guidelines will address specific activities and risks associated with fieldwork, and will assist the supervisor to thoroughly plan their fieldwork. It is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of all activities and risks associated with fieldwork, but rather a starting point. Where appropriate, the fieldwork supervisor should contact the WHS Unit and/or seek appropriate advice for issues which are not specifically addressed in this section.

Information on fieldwork planning for persons with a disability can be found by searching for fieldwork at: <http://www.adcet.edu.au/cats/>

Supervisors, staff and students when planning and conducting the field trip should review the relevant University WHS policies, guidelines and procedures. Documents that are relevant to fieldwork are listed under subject headings as follows:

- [First Aid](#)
- [SafetyNet: Hazard and Incident reporting](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment & Clothing Guidelines](#)
- [Safe use of Mobile Phone Guidelines](#)
- [Working with Sharps Guidelines](#)
- [Policy on Alcohol and Drugs in Employment](#)
- [Working Alone and After Hours Work Guidelines](#)
- [Thermal Comfort](#)

A complete list of WHS policy documents is available on the WHS Unit Web Page at: <http://staff.uow.edu.au/ohs/>.

4.1 Risk Assessment

It is a requirement to conduct a risk assessment for fieldwork activities where there is a risk to health and safety of participants. The supervisor is to distribute the risk assessment to all fieldwork participants including (staff, students, collaborators and volunteers, non-University staff), the Head of Unit and other necessary participants.

The development of the Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form is required for each instance of fieldwork, so that risks can be measured and control strategies implemented. Each task/stage of the fieldwork should be listed and the following steps completed:

- identify the hazards associated with each activity;
- assess risks that may eventuate because of the existing and/or potential hazards;
- identify and document control measures to prevent, or minimise the level of risk;
- ensure adequate resources are provided to implement the necessary control measures; and
- monitor and review the effectiveness of the measures implemented during the fieldwork.

The fieldwork risk assessment also includes an outline of the following:

- Fieldwork supervisor and participants;
- Departure date and time;
- Arrival date and time;
- Accommodation;
- Transport arrangements;

- Catering arrangements;
- Personal protective equipment and clothing requirements;
- Expected weather conditions;
- Certified copies of mandatory qualifications and training.

There are other factors that need to be considered which may include:

- The size of the fieldwork party: how many members are required? How many staff are required for the number of students? (1:15 ratio is good). There should always be at least 2 people that make up a Fieldwork Party.
- Skills and abilities of the Fieldwork Party: Is there a trained first aider in the party? Has everyone been involved in this type of fieldwork before? What training is required to ensure that all members have a suitable level of competency?
- What communication requirements are needed? Are mobile phones sufficient? Is there email access? How remote is the location? Are there communication devices for all vehicles in a fieldwork party? Is a GPS or satellite phone required?
- Breaks for the fieldwork party. Consideration of the fieldwork will determine the number and frequency of breaks that will be required.

Any specific requirements, responsibilities or obligations for the fieldwork should be clearly outlined in the fieldwork risk assessment. For example, no alcohol after 10pm if the fieldwork party is visiting a mine site the next day.

In consultation with the risk assessment general and specific checklists should be developed to ensure nothing is omitted in the packing process. Depending on the location and type of fieldwork a survival kit may also need to be included.

Briefing sessions should be conducted prior to commencing the fieldwork to ensure participants have time for preparation such as acclimatising, medical counselling or acquiring clothing. All participants should be familiar with the requirements of the fieldwork risk assessment.

Fieldwork Risk Assessments are to be filed in a central location within the unit for record keeping purposes. A copy of the fieldwork risk assessment and supporting documentation, i.e. safe work procedures, participation acknowledgement forms, etc should also be kept with the fieldwork party.

4.2 High Risk Activities

Fieldwork involving high risk may require participants to have specific skills or qualifications. Examples include:

- Boating;
- Diving and snorkelling;
- Walking along cliffs or on rock platforms;
- Climbing/abseiling;
- Use of high voltage equipment;
- Four wheel driving;
- Drilling;
- Working at heights.

Fieldwork activities which are assessed as having a high risk require approval by the Head of Unit.

Fieldwork supervisors are to ensure that participants meet the minimum skill, experience and qualification requirements prior to commencement of the fieldwork. Expert advice should be sourced if the supervisor is unsure of the requirements.

High risk activities require a minimum of 1-2 persons trained in first aid. Certified copies of required qualifications and training of fieldwork participants must be filed with the fieldwork risk assessment in the unit prior to the start of the fieldwork.

4.3 Safe Work Procedures

The supervisor should ensure that a safe work procedure is developed for regular or repeated activities that pose a risk to health and safety. The safe work procedure will outline the steps involved in the task/activity and specify how risk associated with identified hazards will be eliminated or reduced. Refer to the [Safe Work Procedures Guidelines](#) for assistance in developing a safe work procedure.

5 Common Fieldwork Hazards

The following outlines common fieldwork hazards which should be taken into consideration in field work planning.

5.1 Vehicles and Driving Safety

When planning fieldwork that is expected to last more than 4 days and/or where the terrain is mostly off road, it is recommended that the field trip organiser determine if the following are required. All vehicles must conform to applicable safety standards including:

- All seats to have seat belts.
- In station wagons and open cabin vehicles, safety screens or nets to be installed to prevent equipment entering the passenger section during sudden stopping.
- If necessary, off-road vehicles should be reinforced inside the cabin to prevent collapse should the vehicle roll over.
- Storage containers such as roof racks and trailers must not be overloaded to ensure safe driving.
- Power steering is desirable for long trips for improved control and to lower driver fatigue.
- Installation of Anti-lock Brake Systems (ABS) prevents the wheels from locking when braking.
- Cruise control is desirable for long trips on highways and freeways.
- Air bags can significantly reduce the severity of injuries in an accident and should be installed if they are not a standard fitting.
- Additional lights for night and/or fog driving and a trouble light and safety triangle should be provided.
- Heavy equipment such as refrigerators, data logging equipment etc. should either be bolted to the floor or be stored in racks that are bolted to the vehicle or trailer.
- Provision of a block and tackle.
- Recovery equipment (e.g. snatch straps) and winches.

For remote field activities the following is recommended.

- Spare fuel tanks or extra jerry cans on racks on the vehicle.
- Carry spare fanbelts for power steering, air-conditioner and alternator.
- Winches should be fitted to all special purpose off-road vehicles.
- A second battery with isolating diodes should be fitted to provide reserve power for radio communication, refrigeration etc.
- A spare water tank/s with sufficient capacity for the party and the location

5.1.1 Driving/Rest Regimes

In NSW on average:

- Driver fatigue accounts for about 17% of fatal crashes per year;
- Country non-urban areas account for about 28% of fatigue related fatal crashes;
- Most fatigue related fatal crashes occur between midnight and 8 am;
- Early to mid-afternoon is also a high risk period for crashes;
- About 51% of fatigue related fatal crashes involve male drivers under 40;

The following principles apply to staff and students driving on bitumen roads under normal conditions on long trips. Trips off road can be more tiring and allowances should be made to reduce driver fatigue in these circumstances.

Total Travel Time

Driving should take up no more than 8 hours in a 24 hour period. The total time spent travelling, including breaks, should not exceed 12 hours, even when two or more staff or students share the driving.

Total Duty per Day

Ordinary duty (which does not involve driving duty) combined with driving duty should not exceed 12 hours in any 24 hour period.

Rest Periods

On completion of each period of 2 hours driving, a person who has driven continuously should take a rest period of at least 20 minutes away from the vehicle. Some form of light exercise is required, e.g. walking. Where staff and students are sharing the driving, it is recommended a change of driver takes place every 2 hours.

Driving Roster

After a person has been the sole driver of a vehicle for three consecutive days and driven for 6-8 hours each day, the fourth day should be a non-driving day.

Alcohol and Drugs

All potential drivers should avoid alcohol or drugs at least twelve hours before and whilst driving. Prescribed medication is permitted if the medication does not interfere with the driver's concentration and reflexes. Some non-prescription medicines, e.g. anti-hay fever tablets or decongestants, contain substances which can impair driver response and reflexes after prolonged usage, and staff and students taking these medicines should not drive within 24 hours of ceasing to administer them. If in doubt, consult a doctor or chemist or refer to the contraindications information, normally supplied with the medicine.

Distance per Day

The distance that can be reasonably covered during a day will be governed by the vehicle, terrain, number of drivers and speed limits. Factors such as general safety, road and weather conditions should be taken into account as well as driver fatigue when planning the trip.

Time of Day

Be especially careful when driving long distances in the early afternoon or at night. Rest periods or driver relief should occur more frequently at these times. In unfenced areas, reduced speeds should be used when driving dusk-to-dawn due to the risk of hitting wildlife. Similarly reduce speeds when driving in dangerous weather conditions such as storms, fog, and heavy rain.

5.2 Catering and Hygiene

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that fieldwork participants are provided with hygienic and wholesome food. Food must be prepared in as hygienic manner as is practicable: gastrointestinal illness could incapacitate a whole group of participants. The following points should be observed:

- All food items must be prepared hygienically, using clean hands and utensils.
- Food should be selected and prepared carefully. In many parts of the world, raw food (salads, meat, seafood etc) should be avoided and fruit washed and peeled before consumption. In cases of doubt, food should be thoroughly cooked to kill any contaminating organisms.
- An adequate supply of safe drinking water should be available. If necessary, the water should be sterilised by boiling, filtration or use of purification tablets. Always assume stream and river waters are unsafe.
- People with hand, nose, and throat or bowel trouble should not prepare food.
- Cuts and sores should be covered with waterproof dressings.
- Smoking, coughing or sneezing over food is to be avoided.
- Food must be kept clean and covered to prevent contamination by dust, insects etc. Food that needs refrigerating should be kept below 5°C.
- Pre-prepared foods should be wrapped tightly or protected in sealed containers before packing them in a cooler. Raw meats should be placed at the bottom of the cooler and ready-to-eat items placed above.
- Pre-cooked food should be cooled as soon as possible and refrigerated within 2 hours. If served hot it must be thoroughly reheated.

5.3 Biosafety

It is important that fieldworkers identify the possible biological hazards they may be exposed to or encounter while carrying out their work in the field.

Wildlife that has the ability to injure, bite, sting or cause some form of infection to fieldworkers may include exposure to snakes, ticks, bees, spiders, wild pigs, cattle, bats and flying foxes, dingoes, crocodiles, sharks, jellyfish, stone-fish and blue-ringed octopus. Additionally some flora has the ability to cause severe stings and allergic reactions.

Standard risk controls should be taken when testing for contaminated soil or water samples.

For more information, consult the [Biosafety Manual](#).

6 Medical Conditions Affecting Fieldwork Participation

In the planning stage of fieldwork, the supervisor is to advise potential participants of their obligation to take appropriate medical advice and disclose any limitations imposed by their health which may affect their ability to safely participate in the fieldwork activities.

In the case that the medical limitation is likely to impact on the safety of the fieldwork, the participant should discuss this directly with the fieldwork supervisor. Alternatively, they should give written authority for their doctor to discuss the functional consequences of their medical condition and specific needs with the supervisor. A risk management approach should be used to determine whether it is suitable for the individual to participate in the fieldwork.

In the case of fieldwork at a remote location, all participants are to be at an appropriate fitness level to carry out the required tasks. When the fieldwork is physically demanding or strenuous, the WHS Unit should be contacted by the fieldwork supervisor for advice on the general assessment of fitness and capacity for fieldwork participants.

It is not appropriate for staff, students or employees with a potentially life threatening medical condition to participate in fieldwork activities at remote locations.

To ensure that the University meets its legal obligations, it is vital that the supervisor maintains documents containing medical information confidentially. To ensure the safe keeping of documents in accordance with the University's Privacy guidelines, please refer to the University's Privacy web site at: <http://www.uow.edu.au/about/privacy/>.

6.1 Health Advice & Vaccinations

Various types of fieldwork may require vaccinations. Vaccination may be required for fieldwork within Australia or international travel. For further information please refer to the [Immunisation Guidelines](#) or medical practitioner.

In addition to the above, fieldwork participants should also be aware that travellers' diarrhoea is the number one illness in travellers and can be caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites which contaminate food and water. Infections may cause diarrhoea and vomiting (E. coli, salmonella, cholera and parasites), fever (typhoid fever and toxoplasmosis) or liver damage (hepatitis).

It is important to understand that recommendations regarding vaccination requirements and health precautions depend on various factors such as the duration of stay, living conditions and location. In addition, medical travel advice changes over time depending on disease trends and medical advances. For this reason, it is important to obtain current advice regarding vaccination requirements prior to the commencement of any field trip. Overseas fieldwork may require specific vaccinations according to location/country of work. Medical advice should be sought from practitioners who specialise in overseas vaccinations refer to [Smart Traveller](#) website for more information.

7 Insurance Liability and Cover

Fieldwork supervisors should ensure they have knowledge of the extent of insurance provisions for the various categories of fieldwork participants where applicable including:

- Staff;
- Students;
- Volunteers;
- Collaborators;
- Honorary Employees.

University employees are covered under the University's Worker's Compensation Policy. Workers Compensation provides injured workers with weekly payments to cover loss of earning capacity, payment of reasonable medical expenses and vocational rehabilitation expenses where necessary to assist a safe return to work.

On the basis of a risk assessment, the fieldwork supervisor should assess whether the insurance provisions are appropriate and ensure that suitable insurance is obtained prior to commencement of the fieldwork. Any questions on insurance cover should be directed to the Procurement Manager, Financial Services.

Insurance provisions for vehicles and equipment should also be clarified with the Procurement Manager, Financial Services.

Fieldwork participants should be informed of the extent of insurance provisions prior to commencing the fieldwork.

8 Review

In order to ensure that these guidelines continue to be effective and applicable to the University they will be reviewed triennially by the WHS Unit in consultation with the WHS Committee and stakeholders.

Conditions which might warrant a review of the guidelines on a more frequent basis would include:

- reported hazards or injuries;
- non-conforming systems;
- WHS Committee concern.

Following the completion of any review, the program will be revised and updated in order to correct any deficiencies. These changes will be communicated to the University community via the WHS Committee.

9 Related Documents

- [Fieldwork Risk Assessment Form](#)
- [Fieldwork Participant Acknowledgement Form](#)

10 References

- Fieldwork Safety Guidelines, The University of Queensland
- Fieldwork Safety Guidelines, The University of New South Wales
- Food Safety Practices & General Requirements Standard 3.2.2 – Food Standards Australia New Zealand
- Guidelines for the safe conduct of sport and physical activity in schools – NSW Department of Education and Training
- NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011
- Travellers' Health, 2003 – Centre for Disease Control & Prevention

11 Version Details

Version Control	Date Released	Approved By	Amendment
1	May 2006	Manager WHS	Document Created
2	January 2008	Manager WHS	Incorporation of Faculty of Science Fieldwork Guidelines.
3	March 2010	Manager WHS	Scheduled review minor amendments.
4	August 2010	Manager WHS	Document updated to incorporate the Personnel name change to Human Resources Division.
5	March 2012	Manager WHS	Re-brand.
6	May 2013	Manager WHS	Legislative update
7	November 2013	Manager WHS	Scheduled review. No major changes.
8	May 2015	Manager WHS	Aligned to the risk management methodology outlined in the Business Assurance Risk Management Policy. Removed references to extreme risks.